vetted by Audit, are furnished to Public Accounts Committee on Audit Paras included in C&AG Reports.

(c) It is Railways' constant endeavour to provide adequate amenities to the passengers at its stations. Elimination of deficiency in amenities and its augmentation is a continuous process and every year, the availability of amenities at stations is reviewed and the works are undertaken considering the availability of resources and other relative priorities. Zonal Railways have been instructed to take into account all such suggestions while formulating their Annual Works Programme proposals.

Every year, Railways' are making high allotments for passenger amenity works. An Allotment of Rs. 200 crore has been made for "Passenger Amenities" during 2002-2003 as against Revised estimate of Rs. 169 crore for the year 2001-2002. Further, to celebrate the 150th year of Railway services, the coming year has been dedicated to 'rail traveller' and has been declared as the "Passenger Amenities Year".

Moreover, Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) has been set up to upgrade, professionalise and modernise the catering and hospitality services over Indian Railways.

Decongestion of saturated rail routes

2892. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY:
SHRI RAMA MUNI REDDY SIRIGIREDDY:

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news report, "Railway Panel wants saturated routes decongested", published in the Hindu dated the 13th March, 2002;

(b) if so, the details thereof and Government's reaction thereto;

(c) steps proposed to be taken in this regard; and

(d) the amount of investment required to revamp the basic infrastructure, like routes?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI O. RAJAGOPAL): (a) to (d) Yes, Sir. The news report is regarding the recommendations contained in the Fourth Report of the Railway Convention Committee (1999) on Development of Alternative Routes for Decongesting Existing Routes. Highlighting the need to strengthen the Rail network on the Golden Quardrilateral and the two diagonals, the article has also brought out the precarious financial position of the Railways and the extremely thin spread of the available resources. The article has also talked about the need for a more rational use of the available resources and a concerted effort to explore all possible avenues for additional resources.

The need to enhance line capacity on saturated routes in general, and on the Golden Quadrilateral in particular, is one of the priority areas for Indian Railways. In this regard, for following specific areas of investment have been identified:

- Doubling of remaining single line sections
- Additional lines on selected routes.
- Electrification of the unelectrified sections
- Grade separation at important road-rail crossings
- Signalling Improvements & Manning of Level Crossings.
- Increasing speed of freight trains to reduce speed differential between freight trains and Mail/Express trains.
- Introduction of High Horse Power Locomotives
- Track upgradation.

The total requirement of funds for strengthening the Golden Quadrilateral on the above lines is approximately Rs. 16,000 Crores.

A number of steps have also been taken to improve the resource availability and utilisation position.

- The probelm of large shelf of on going projects leading to thin spread of resources is more acute in respect of New Lines and Gauge Conversion projects. In order to enable judicious allocation of resources these projects have been prioritised on the basis of their operational requirements, physical progress, national and strategic importance and social desirability.

- Special Railway Safety Fund of Rs. 17,000 Crores has been created to undertake renewal of overaged assets, which the Railways were unable to undertake in the normal course due to shortfall in internal generation.

- By rationalizing the passenger fare in the current year's budget the resource base of the Railways is expected to be augmented by Rs. 910 crores.

- In order to contain the staff costs, railways have been progressively reducing their staff strength. During the tenth Plan it is proposed to achieve 2% reduction in staff strength every year.

- Railways have already started drawing power directly from NTPC at a few locations. Railways are also exploring the possibility of setting up captive power houses for generating electricity for traction purposes. These steps are likely to bring down high cost of electric traction.

- Steps are being taken to involve the private sector and the State Governments in execution of Railway projects through financial participation by means of SPVs or through cost sharing. In addition projects are also sought to be executed through the BOT scheme.